

## The Use of ‘I’ by Prominent Academic Writers: A Comparison Analysis on Nunan’s and Tomlinson’s Papers

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### ABSTRACT

The personal pronoun ‘I’ could provide significant impacts towards the readers if it is used appropriately in academic writing. However, the usage of this pronoun in academic paper is occasionally absence and uncommon among academicians or researchers. However, there are prominent writers in ESL fields that go beyond the stereotype norm of academic writing and frequently use this type of particular pronoun in majority of their works. Therefore, this paper attempts to analyze the usage of personal pronoun ‘I’ among these prominent writers’ papers in term of its frequency and function. For the purpose of this research, papers from two prominent ESL academicians have been selected as sample of this study and analyzed based on ‘I’ model and framework. Based on the findings, it was identified that both of the prominent writers demonstrated a high usage of personal pronoun ‘I’ in their papers for their own personal purposes such as for claiming their own ideas or theory as well as part of their writing strategy and styles.

**KEYWORDS:** Prominent Writers, Academic Writing, Writing Styles, Paper, Pronoun ‘I’, ESL.

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### INTRODUCTION

“When a man is talking about scientific subjects, the little word ‘I’ should play no part in his expositions...” [3]

The personal pronoun ‘I’ is basically representing a powerful word which could give high impact towards the audience when it is used appropriately in an academic writing such as in a paper. However, the usage of this pronoun is quite infrequent and unexpected to be found due to the restrictions of traditional academic paper “golden rules” that emphasized and required academic paper to be as objective as possible as suggested by [3]. However, there are several prominent writers in ESL fields that exhibit the determination to go against this stereotype norm and use the personal pronoun ‘I’ in most of their research paper. Hence, this paper will attempt to analyze the usage of personal pronoun ‘I’ in these prominent writers papers in term of its frequency and function. For this purpose, two prominent writers; David Nunan’s and Brian Tomlinson’s paper were selected as the sample for this study due to their credibility as the prominent academic writers and for their frequent usage of personal pronoun ‘I’ in most of their papers.


#### Background and Theoretical Framework of the Study

The first prominent writer selected is David Nunan. He is an academician, a researcher, writer and also a famous linguist who has greatly contributed towards ESL field of learning and teaching. Through his life, David Nunan has produced number of high impact research articles and top-notch books as references for ESL teachers and researchers. In addition, one of his ELT books entitled “Go For It” was selling world widely and has already exceeding 2.5 billion copies of sales. Currently, he acts as Academic Advisor for the Global English Corporation and one of the respective members for Executive Committee of The International Research Foundation for English Language Education.

The second prominent writer selected for this study is Brian Tomlinson. Similar to David Nunan, Tomlinson also provides a significant contribution towards the field of ESL especially in the area of materials development. This academic writer also has produced many outstanding research articles and books such as “Materials Development in Language Teaching” and “Developing Materials for Language Teaching” which are used by ESL teachers all around the world as references and textbooks for teacher training courses. Currently, Brian Tomlinson holds the position as a Visiting Professor at Leeds Metropolitan University and the Academic Director of TEFL. In addition, he is also the founder and President of MATSDA (The International Materials Development Association).

The principal framework of this study is based on [8] 'I' model. The functions of this model is as the reference to identify the function of personal pronoun 'I' in academic papers and to identify the level of 'authority' implied by the writers in their writing. In addition, the personal pronoun 'I' in this model also includes the plural form such as 'we' and 'us'. Table 1 provides general and brief description of 'I' model:

Table 1: 'I' analysis model [8]

	Role	Function
 <p>Least Authority</p> <p>Powerful Authority</p>	No 'I'	-
	Representative	Proxy for a larger group of reader
	Guide	Guide the reader in reading process of the paper (involving the reader)
	Architect	Creating structure in the writing process
	Recounters of research proposal	Describes or recount the various steps of the research process
	Opinion Holder	Shares opinion, view or attitude to known established fact or argument
	Originator	Ideas or knowledge claimed by the author

### Research Objective

There are two general objectives of this study:

- 1) To identify the frequency of personal pronoun 'I' used between the two prominent academic writers' papers.
- 2) To examine the role or function of 'I' between the two prominent academic writers' papers.

### Research Question

Two research questions are generated based on the objectives of the study:

- 1) What is the frequency of personal pronoun 'I' used between the two prominent academic writers' papers?
- 2) What is the role or function of 'I' between the two prominent academic writers' papers?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Naturally, academic writing genre had been considered as being dry, impersonal and less interaction. Hence, it is being isolated from other kind of genre such as magazine, story books and etc. which provides more enjoyment and interaction towards the audience. In term of discussing the nature of academic writing, in [1] claimed that the usage of personal pronoun can indirectly influence the nature of this genre towards the audience:

“The use of first person pronouns is thus not necessarily a feature which differentiates spoken from written language, but rather a feature which the absence of a direct audience may even foster when the circumstances are right. At the same time, as we can see from the figure for academic papers, writing can create a context in which maximum suppression of one's own identity is possible.” [1]

In addition, according to [7] present research and study has shown that academic writing is no longer seen as isolated and impersonal, but as a genre in which the author's presence is becoming more significant and pertinent. He further elaborated that it was found that the use of first person personal noun in academic writing has been gradually increasing. Hence, it could be assumed that academic writing nowadays is more flexible in providing the opportunity for the writers or authors to create their own identities within the genre.

In accordance with that, in [8] have conducted a study that focusing on the usage of first person pronoun ‘I’ based on students’ use of pronouns in their academic writing. Based on their study, they manage to come out with the ‘I’ model which focused on the function of ‘I’ and the degree of authorial presence in academic writing. In addition, it was found that most students usage of ‘I’ were range from the least authority ‘I’ as representative to the most powerful ‘I’ as originator that is rarely used by the students. Another study on this issue conducted by [4] also able to provide us with a significant outcome. By referring to students’ academic writing he was able to identify the role of personal pronoun and categorized it into several categories; stating a purpose, explaining a procedure, stating results or claims, expressing self-benefits and elaborating an argument.

**METHODOLOGY**

One paper from each selected prominent writer was collected from [6] as the sample of this corpus study. Study from [6, 9] was selected for this purpose. Frequency analysis was used to identify the numbers of ‘I’ used in each paper. Next, the data was analyzed, categorized and depicted in a table based on [8] ‘I’ Analysis Model.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Findings**

The following Table 2 depicted the frequency of the personal pronoun ‘I’ usage in [6, 9] studies:

Table 2: Analysis on the frequency and role for personal pronoun ‘I’

Role and Function of ‘I’	Frequency of ‘I’ for [6]	%	Frequency of ‘I’ for [9]	%
Representative	0	0	3	13
Guide	8	32	2	9
Architect	9	36	1	4
Recounters of Research Process	3	12	1	4
Opinion Holder	1	4	5	22
Originator	4	16	11	48
Total	25	100	23	100

From Table 2, it could be identified that there are differences that exist between the two prominent academic writers in using personal pronoun ‘I’ in their paper. The first difference is in the total of the frequency. In [6] has a total numbers of 25 personal pronoun ‘I’ as compared to [9]; 23. The different purpose, function and role of the personal pronoun ‘I’ also could be derived from the data. The followings are the summary of the findings based on [8] ‘I’ model:

For the role and function of ‘I’ as Representative, in [6] contained none from this category. In contrast, in [9] comprised of 3 (13%) of ‘I’ from this category. For the role and function of ‘I’ as Guide, in [6] contained 8 (32%) of ‘I’ from this category. In contrast, in [9] comprised of 2 (9%) of ‘I’ from this category. For the role and function of ‘I’ as Architect, in [6] contained 9(36%) of ‘I’ from this category. In contrast, in [9] comprised of 1 (4%) of ‘I’ from this category. For the role and function of ‘I’ as Recounter of Research Process, in [6] contained 3 (12%) of ‘I’ from this category. In contrast, in [9] comprised only 1 (4%) of ‘I’ from this category. For the role and function of ‘I’ as Opinion Holder, in [6] contained 1 (4%) of ‘I’ from this category. In contrast, in [9] comprised of 5 (22%) of ‘I’ from this category.

Lastly, for the role and function of ‘I’ as Originator, in [6] contained 4 (16%) of ‘I’ from this category. In contrast, in [9] comprised of 11(48%) of ‘I’ from this category.

**DISCUSSION**

Based on the findings, it shows that [6] contained more ‘I’ as compared to [9]. In [6] contained 25 ‘I’ compared to [9]; 23. As we can clearly see, the differences is quite small but it still provides us verification that prominent academic writers such as [6, 9] do use a large amount of personal pronoun ‘I’ in their academic writing. However, we cannot make a generalized assumption on this matter towards other academic prominent writers based on this finding as this study only focus on these two prominent writers.

Besides that, the findings also able to highlight the most and the least function of ‘I’ used by these two writers in their paper. The highest category that the personal pronoun ‘I’ represented in [6] is Architect and the

least is Representative. On the other hand, the highest category of 'I' for [9] is on the Originator and the least is Architect and Recounter of Research Process.

If we analyze these findings closely based on [8] 'I' Analysis Model, we may find that the degrees of authority between these two writers are quite distinctive. As the percentage of 'I' as Originator is higher as compared to the other function of 'I' found in [9], it indicates that [9] level of "authority" in his writing is higher as compared to [6]. This is due to the results that the function of 'I' found in [6] is mostly catered for the Architect category, which is at the moderate level of "authority".

Hence, it could be assumed that the main function or roles of 'I' in [9] indicates his claiming of his own ideas or knowledge that to be shared with the audience (readers) as a contribution to the ESL field. Thus, this kind of action could be an indication of the author's awareness of his position or "discourse roles" as a prominent academic writer as claimed by [2]. According to [2], "discourse roles" refer to:

"...identities that a person acquires by participation in a particular discourse community (e.g. a lawyer or a client in the legal discourse community, a doctor or a patient in the medical discourse community). Generally, these roles only hold within the confines of that discourse community." [2]

On the other hand, the main function of 'I' in [6] is part of his writing strategies to help the readers understand the structure and the essential content. This aligned with [5] statement that emphasized personal pronouns usage in academic writing as a beneficial writing strategy that enables academic writer to interact with the audience through their writing and allow the audience to clearly identify the points or part of the writing that the writers attempted to highlight.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In essence, it could be concluded that both of the prominent writers show a high usage of personal pronoun 'I' in their paper for their own specific purpose and intention. Although the function or purpose on the usage of the personal pronoun 'I' between these two prominent writers are clearly distinctive, it is still adequate to make us (researchers, academician, students and etc.) realize how it could give significant impacts towards readers' understanding and interaction with the academic texts. In accordance with [8] 'I' Analysis Model, it could be identified that the main function for the pronoun 'I' in [9] is for him to claim his own ideas or knowledge that he wanted to share with the audience (readers). On the contrary, the abundant usage of personal pronoun 'I' in [6] is his unique writing strategy to help the readers understand the structure and the essential content of his paper. Therefore, the issue of whether we could use personal pronoun 'I' in our academic writing is supposedly not to be seen as a negative connotation. Hence, it should be seen as advancement in academic writing in order to attract more readers and more space for argument and discussion of new ideas. Additionally, it would make the text more interactive and engaging. Thus, a further and wide study involving a larger corpus of study on this issue such as whether the personal pronoun 'I' usage in academic writing is exclusive only for prominent and famous academic writers should be conducted in order to fill the gaps that exist within this realm of research.

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